

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-09

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 AF-06 IO-10 CIAE-00 DODE-00

PM-03 H-02 INR-07 L-02 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01

SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 /082 W
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R 021314Z APR 75

FM AMEMBASSY TUNIS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8643

INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS

AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY RABAT

AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

C O N F I D E N T I A L TUNIS 1904

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR TS LY

SUBJECT: TUNISIAN FOREIGN MINISTER DESCRIBES

QADHAFI VISIT TO TUNISIA

REF: TUNIS 1713 (NOTAL)

1. FOREIGN MINISTER CHATTI INFORMED ME APRIL 1 THAT QADHAFI'S VISIT TO TUNISIA MARCH 24 WAS RESULT OF MISUNDERSTANDING. HE SAID THAT WHILE SHAKING HANDS WITH ARAB AMBASSADORS COLLECTED AT AIRPORT ON OCCASION RECENT VISIT OF IRAQI LEADER SADDAM HUSSEIN, PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA COMMENTED TO LIBYAN HIGH REPRESENTATIVE ZENTATI, "I HAVE NOT SEEN YOUR PRESIDENT FOR SOME TIME." ZENTATI INTERPRETED OR CHOSE TO INTERPRET BOURGUIBA'S FRIENDLY COMMENT AS
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AN OFFICIAL INVITATION TO QADHAFI TO VISIT TUNISIA. WHEN

BOURGUIBA DISCOVERED THIS, HE CALLED QADHAFI BY TELEPHONE TO CLARIFY THAT HE HAD NOT RPT NOT EXTENDED AN OFFICIAL INVITATION TO HIM BUT THAT QADHAFI WAS, AS USUAL, WELCOME ANY TIME. BECAUSE QADHAFI BECAME UPSET AT WHAT APPEARED TO HIM TO BE A TUNISIAN BACKING OFF, TUNISIANS DECIDED THEY SHOULD GO THROUGH WITH AN INVITATION. ACCORDINGLY, BOURGUIBA INVITED QADHAFI TO JOIN HIM AT THE TRADITIONAL PROPHET'S BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION AT THE HOLY CITY OF KAIROUAN.

2. CHATTI SAID THAT THE TRAGIC ASSASSINATION OF KING FAISAL SAVED THE DAY AS FAR AS TUNISIAN-LIBYAN RELATIONS ARE CONCERNED SINCE FAISAL'S DEATH CUT SHORT QADHAFI'S VISIT AND "MINIMIZED THE DAMAGE." CHATTI INDICATED THAT QADHAFI DID HAVE TIME TO TELL THE PRESS THAT THE DJERBA UNION DECLARATION SHOULD BE IMPLEMENTED. WHEN I NOTED THAT TUNISIAN PRESS HAD REVEALED NO SUCH DECLARATION, CHATTI RESPONDED THAT A REPORT OF QADHAFI'S DECLARATION HAS APPEARED ON THE RADIO NEWS.

3. RE UNION WITH LIBYA, CHATTI CONTINUED, TUNISIAN SIDE GAVE USUAL REASONS WHY IMMEDIATE UNION NOT IN THE CARDS, INCLUDING NEED TO AMEND TUNISIAN CONSTITUTION TO PERMIT REFERENDUM. CHATTI ALSO REPORTED THAT DURING DISCUSSION OF ONGOING JOINT TUNISIAN-LIBYAN ECONOMIC PROJECTS, SUCH AS PLANNED RAILROAD BETWEEN SFAX AND TRIPOLI, TUNISIANS TOLD QADHAFI THAT IT WAS UP TO HIM AS TO WHETHER THESE PROJECTS WOULD BE IMPLEMENTED. CHATTI SAID TUNISIANS PLAYED MATTER IN LOW KEY AND QADHAFI RESPONDED THAT HE WANTED TO CARRY OUT THESE PROJECTS. CHATTI COMMENTED THAT HE DID NOT KNOW WHETHER QADHAFI MEANT WHAT HE SAID, BUT TIME WOULD TELL.

4. COMMENT: CHATTI'S AUTHENTIC REPORT OF QADHAFI VISIT CONFIRMS OUR IMPRESSION (REFTEL) THAT THERE IS NO CHANGE IN CONTINUED STANDOFFISH RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THESE TWO COUNTRIES AND THAT TUNISIAN GOVERNMENT CONTINUES TO BE WORRIED ABOUT WHAT QADHAFI MIGHT HAVE UP HIS SLEEVE.
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